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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003614

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: WASIT SADRISTS FRACTURING; SOME MAY SUPPORT PRIME  
MINISTER

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3562  
[B](#). BAGHDAD 3480  
[C](#). BAGHDAD 3144

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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[1](#). (C) In separate November 9 discussions with Senior Advisor Gordon Gray in Wasit, Sadrists Provincial Council (PC) member Ahmed Hassan E'barah and independent PC Chairman Hassan Jabbar described further splits among Sadrists in Wasit and other southern provinces. E'barah, who recently delivered a message to the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) from Muqtada al-Sadr, lamented that Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) leaders have resisted Muqtada's instructions of late. He complained that OMS has directed Sadrists to support specific election lists without Muqtada's consent, and hinted that OMS and Da'wa will cooperate in the elections. Jabbar spoke of the difficulty of finding Sadrists or OMS representatives who truly represent Muqtada, and said that only Muqtada could impose control. He confirmed that Prime Minister Maliki's Dawa party has made inroads with local Sadrists for purposes of the upcoming provincial elections. Both asserted that Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) was effectively a broken force, though Jabbar thought it could regain strength with outside help. End summary.

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Who Represents Muqtada?  
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[2](#). (C) E'barah, who submitted to PRT Wasit in September a statement from Muqtada al-Sadr outlining al-Mumahidoon, sounded increasingly disenchanted with the direction taken by the OMS governing structure in Najaf. He criticized OMS leaders for resisting Muqtada's calls to redirect their efforts toward social services (ref C). He was particularly irritated that the OMS office in Najaf had directed members to support the "Independent Trend" list in Wasit's provincial elections, despite Muqtada's orders for Sadrists not to coalesce behind a single list. In protest, E'barah will run in the elections on another independent Sadrists list. E'barah claimed that educated Wasit Sadrists such as himself, who used to be affiliated with Basra Sheikh Yacoubi, have increasingly turned on the Najaf OMS and speak as "Sadrists" who respond only to orders from Muqtada.

[3](#). (C) PC Council Chairman Jabbar had a different take on divisions among the Sadrists, based on his dealings with them on the Council, and in the lead-up to the Charge of the Knights operation earlier this year. Jabbar expressed a dim view of Sadrists on the PC, saying they "always found a way to justify JAM violence." He noted that prior to Charge of the Knights, when JAM members were visibly mobilizing in Kut, Jabbar had difficulty finding an appropriate OMS representative. One Sadrists PC member, Haji al-Ahad, attempted to play intermediary with OMS in

Baghdad and Najaf but eventually had to admit he had no influence. The Chairman surmised that local OMS "representatives" are freelancers and that JAM elements only answer to Muqtada. Jabbar noted, however, that he had met Muqtada in Najaf once, and came away with the distinct impression that Muqtada himself was not in complete control of his movement.

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Provincial Elections: OMS and Da'wa?  
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14. (C) Given Muqtada's absence, Wasit Sadrists (whether OMS-affiliated or not) have been searching for new leadership and new political alliances. Jabbar confirmed reports that Da'wa had gained the support of some Wasit Sadrists, noting a recent meeting in which influential local sheikh Mohammed Ridda al-Numani brought a large delegation to meet with the Prime Minister and "praised him as never before." (ref B) He characterized Numani as not only a sheikh, but also a prominent Sadrism with clerical credentials. E'barah agreed that Da'wa increasingly has an upper hand over ISCI in reaching out to Sadrism voters. He noted that Wasit Sadrists tend to live in urban centers, that the majority of voters with strong tribal ties now live in urban centers, and that the Prime Minister's Da'wa party has been effective in reaching out to tribal leaders through Support Councils. (Note: OMS-Da'wa alliances have been noted recently in other provinces, notably in Najaf (ref A) and Karbala. End note.) Jabbar added that Minister of Interior (MoI) Jawad Bulani was also having some success in attracting the support of Sadrists to his Dustoor Party.

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JAM Prospects in Wasit  
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15. (C) Both E'barah and Jabbar believed that JAM in Wasit has been weakened to the extent that it is no longer operational.

E'barah said that Wasit had never been a focus of JAM activity, but was rather a transit point for JAM members moving among strongholds in Basra, Maysan, and Baghdad. Previous JAM strength had much to do with the weakness and disorganization of Iraqi Security Forces, which had more recently asserted themselves effectively in the province. Muqtada was clear in his instructions for Sadrists to move away from violence and for JAM to transition to the social and cultural Mumahidoon organization. Jabbar spoke more cautiously, arguing that while JAM does not have grassroots support, it still has hardcore supporters in urban areas, including al-Hayy, Numayniyah, and the south bank of Kut. He believed that JAM could regain operational strength if it received outside support from other areas of Iraq and beyond. Jabbar said he had increased security checks in the province in order to stop Iranian and Syrian agents who might want to work with former JAM elements to disrupt the election process. E'barah, for his part, said that former JAM members are not pro-Iranian and would not support aggressive Iranian ambitions.

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Security Concerns: IA, IP  
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16. (C) E'barah and Jabbar both noted improved performance by the Iraqi Army (IA) and Iraqi Police (IP). Interestingly, Jabbar thought that performance among the IP had improved more dramatically while E'barah was more impressed by professionalism within the IA. E'barah complained bitterly that local police continue to mistreat Sadrists, and urged Coalition Forces to continue mentoring local security forces towards improved human rights practices. He added that SWAT units, with outside training, were more "even-handed and professional" than

their IP colleagues. While conceding that "the security forces are the only people hiring," he held that followers of Muqtada should follow the guidance of their leader and not enter the security forces.

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Comment  
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17. (C) Speaking from different perspectives, E'barah and Jabbar each portray a fracturing Sadrism movement in which its purported leaders seek new alliances while claiming to speak for Muqtada al-Sadr. It is open to question whether E'barah, provincial OMS leaders in Wasit, or Sadrists in any other provinces have an ongoing line of communication with Muqtada. (The variety of letters "from Muqtada" received by PRTs in the south over the past two months, each with a different message, may reflect the desires of rival Sadrists to shape a message in the absence of any genuine communication from Muqtada.) In any case, the Prime Minister and his party have taken advantage of the leadership deficiency to develop stronger relationships with OMS in Wasit and other provinces -- and also with OMS on the national level (septel). While Da'wa-OMS cooperation is still in its initial stages, the potential implications for Iraqi politics are significant. End comment.  
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